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Complete Chester Gould's Dick Tracy Volume 13



Synopsis

Dick and Tess's house fire-bombed! B.O. Plenty riddled with bullets! Sam Catchum apparently crushed to death! This volume's villains include Blowtop, T.V. Wiggles, Dr. Plain, and Empty Williams. Plus, a baby named Bonnie Braids is born, Vitamin Flintheart returns, and who's the mysterious woman named Crewy Lou? Contains all Dick Tracy strips from March 26, 1950 - September 15, 1951. -The Library of American Comics is the world's #1 publisher of classic newspaper comic strips, with 14 Eisner Award nominations and three wins for best book. LOAC has become "the gold standard for archival comic strip reprints" - The research and articles provide insight and context, and most importantly the glorious reproduction of the material has preserved these strips for those who knew them and offers a new gateway to adventure for those discovering them for the first time." - Scoop

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Chester Gould (1900-1985) was born in Pawnee, Oklahoma, the son of a newspaperman and grandson of a circuit-riding preacher. He attended Oklahoma A&M (now Oklahoma State University) before transferring to Northwestern University in Chicago, from which he graduated in 1923. He produced the minor comic strips *Fillum Fables* and *The Radio Catts* before striking it big with *Dick Tracy* in 1931. Originally titled *Plainclothes Tracy*, the rechristened strip became one of the most successful and lauded comic strips of all time, as well as a media and merchandising sensation. He was twice accorded the "Cartoonist of

the Year's Best Reuben Award by his peers. Gould continued to write and illustrate Dick Tracy until his retirement in 1977.

We've passed the period of the most recognizable Dick Tracy villains but Blowtop is one of my favorite from the past few years. The brother of classic Tracy villain Flattop, Blowtop's defining characteristic is his explosive temper. He also seeks revenge against Dick Tracy for the death of his brother, at least for a time and then that's forgotten about. This leads to one of the most unintentionally hilarious scenes in Dick Tracy history when Blowtop sets off a bomb at Tracy's house. In the resulting fire Dick Tracy rushes around with his hair literally ablaze. Priceless. Vitamin Flintheart returns and gets tied up with Blowtop for a significant part of the story but strangely enough Gould never capitalizes on the fact the Flintheart was involved in the death of Flattop. The second villain, T.V. Wiggles, is one of the weirdest villains ever and not in a good way. He's a shakedown artist who demands money from bars with television sets or he'll spray corn syrup in the back to ruining them. He is also an ex pro-wrestler (although he looks nothing like one) who knows a pressure point capable putting someone in a comatose state until he undoes the paralyzing effect. As if all that wasn't goofy enough his scheme is to shakedown Vitamin Flintheart who is acting as the agent of Sparkle Plenty who is discovered to have such phenomenal singing talents that she can command a salary of ten grand A WEEK! Everything about this story is ludicrous and cringe worthy. The ending is also one of the sappiest in Dick Tracy history and that's an achievement. Following T.V. Wiggles is a shorter than normal storyline involving the villainous Dr. Plain. I liked this one because Gould diverged somewhat from his typical formula and kept the story very tight and compact. Dr. Plain's gimmick was a missing hand replaced by a flame thrower which he used to immolate people. He had a very specific plan and carried it through. We also don't get the obligatory chase the villain ending. After Dr. Plain, Gould gave his readers Empty Williams, a villain whose defining characteristic is that he says, "as a matter of fact" with nearly every sentence. Empty may be the most inept villain Gould had yet to create but I don't get the impression Gould intended for him to be such a buffoon. His gang accidentally steals a truckload of 120,000 diapers and then try to sell them for \$5000. When that deal goes sour they kill the buyer and just take the money which they could have simply done without the diapers. Everything Empty does is moronic except his ability to escape and extend this overlong storyline. The writer of the introduction stated that his

all-time favorite storyline was the one with Crewy Lou and on this rare occasion I actually agree. This biggest asset to this story is that Gould diverges from his very tight formula. Crewy Lou not only finds herself trying to avoid capture, she also finds herself in a war with another criminal named Æthe King as well as her own brother who intends to kill her for bringing shame to the family. I found myself sympathetic to Crewy Lou as she escaped from one deadly situation after another. Everything seems to work in the story from the plot to the characterization. My only complaint is the sudden birth of Dick Tracy's daughter, Bonny Braids. This is as strong of evidence as there is that Gould did almost no long term planning in his plots since there is absolutely no indication that Tess was even pregnant. Bonnie Braids is an annoyingly precious little girl that I could have done without. As far as I'm concerned Blowtop and Crewy Lou are the stars of volume 13 with Dr. Plain coming in third due to his uniqueness and a decently well thought out (if overly complex) plan. Crewy Lou headlines volume 14 but most of her story is here. T.V. Wiggles was just weird and Empty was a total dud. We'll see if the Crewy Lou storyline is a portent of greater stories to come or if it was a single alignment of stars.

Really good stuff. I still prefer the rustic charms of the 1930's and early 40's era Tracy, but this later stuff is great, too. Note: I found these books awkward to read, due to their width and weight, and it was easy to fold and tear the dust jacket while moving the book around. I now remove the dust jacket before I begin reading a volume, and set it aside in a safe place until I am finished. Without the dust jacket, the book is much easier to grip and the cover art stays in pristine condition.

I bought this book after reading "The Gould Rush, The Mad Allure Of Dick Tracy", an essay by Frank Young in the Comics Journal. Young's premise was that Chester Gould hit his peak as a storyteller in the fifties. After reading this volume, which presents the strip from March 27th 1950 to September 15th, 1951, I think Young hit it square on the head. Gould by this time the complete master of the art of the continuing narrative newspaper comic strip. I read an interview with Gould, in which he said that the average reading time if a daily comic strip was about 3 seconds. I think this is the reason for the stylized art, which quickly caught the readers eye and made the characters instantly recognizable. I think this, while a brilliant method of holding an audience, somewhat detracts from Gould's solid draftsmanship of cityscapes, weaponry and everyday objects. Gould's writing at this stage had progressed from the reflection of current events in the thirties and the beginnings of the grotesque villains, which became a staple of the strip, in the forties. By the fifties,

Gould's imagination had reached the perfect balance of discipline and the bizarre. This volume abounds in freakish villains still grounded enough in reality, in both action and motivation to create a consistently compelling narrative. While some of the plot elements are a little on the comic book goofy side, the strip maintains a grim consistency in even the filler continuities. While I would dispute the claims made by some proclaiming Gould's "greatness" as a mystery writer or artist, I think that within the narrow parameters of the comic strip, there was no one better. Check it out, I think you will agree.

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